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Chairman Marvin Abney  
House Committee on Finance  
Rhode Island State House  
Room 35  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, RI 02903

March 23, 2021

ATTN: Christopher O'Brien, Committee Clerk

***AGAINST House Bill 5193 - Establishment of Charter Schools***

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

My name is Angel Mendez and I am a resident of Central falls, RI. I am writing to express my strong opposition to Representative O'Brien's bill, H-5193, regarding charter schools.

I've worked at Segue Institute for Learning for over three years. Not only Segue is an amazing place to work in, but it is even a better place for students and families. I can testify it because my daughter was proudly a Segue student for three years.

As a member of Segue's Information and Technology (IT) Department, I've had the pleasure to see students growing not only as individuals armed to reach success academically but, even more important as great citizens and human beings. As our slogan says, at our school "Every Student is at Promise!". This is something that we honestly believe and it is our everyday goal to be sure that it stays a reality. Our students get all the assistance that all of them require to be prepared for High School and beyond.

Of course, students are always the priority for all of us members of the Segue community but our Admin team is always watching that our work environment is healthy and friendly for everyone. I can honestly say that all teachers and staff at Segue always play for the same team: Students. Our Admin team is always looking at different strategies to offer us the support we need so we can offer students education services of the highest quality.

At Segue, we don't only support students but we also offer great support for their families and the community in general. We have a food pantry that services all the city of Central Falls. We help students in need to acquire winter wearables like hats, gloves, jackets, scarfs, etc. Students who can't afford uniforms also get help here so they can access them. Whenever we can and we get additional funds, we help families to pay utility bills and rent. It is important to remember that many Central Falls families have very low income and are in poverty. When our families have a need that we are not able to satisfy, our Families Engagement Committee (FEC) directs them to the most appropriate resources while offering all kinds of support.

At Segue, we bring technology to the hands of all our students; providing them with the tools they need to reach success. We have also spent a great deal of resources to be sure that we are keeping up with this evolving digital world so our teachers and staff also have the best equipment to offer instruction and support. Safety is also very important for us and we have been improving our security systems (including cameras) and procedures to make sure that students are not only safe at our school but also that they feel safe. How are we able to afford all of those improvement projects? Well, the answer to that question is a key element to our success and growth: our Admin team is always in the look for all sort of grants and different funds that are available for those purposes. They make sure that we apply to all those available resources so we can get the most to use them for the benefit of our students.

Like I mentioned earlier, my daughter is part of the Segue alumni. She graduated from middle school in 2020. She, my wife and I really wish that Segue had a high school so she could continue at Segue. She has been diagnosed with Autisms and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Those conditions have set some obstacles for her education but she was very successful at Segue. The great team of professionals that work here made sure that my daughter got the support that she needed to learn. They also got my wife and I (as a parent) involved in her education. This is a story that is heard again and again from parents that has kids with special needs. They love Segue and they all wish that Segue had a high school. It is not a surprised that alumni and their parents love been involved with Segue even after graduation. It is not a surprised either that the Central Falls Community is constantly requesting and supporting that Segue offers more grades for their little ones.

Central falls population consists mostly of minorities and a great percentage of Segue students are English Learners (ELs). As results from the Access standard test have shown, students that come to our school don't remain as ELs for a long time, they improve so much that they are no longer considered ELs under the state classifications. Even with all the difficulties that the Central Falls families face that are not common to other communities, our students are on par or higher with the rest of the state on both ELA and Math. This information is according to results from standard state tests in the last couple of years. This is public information and can be verified on the website of the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE).

Our school already went through a rigorous evaluation by the RIDE and was approved to have an expansion for grades K to 2. Resources has already been spent to make it a reality and many many families have already applied to enroll their children in grade K which hopefully and rightfully our community deserves to have access to at our school in the next school year. It would be so sad and unfair that the proposed bill against charter schools is approved and specially when many of those that support it are people who don't really know much about charter schools.

As a parent, Segue staff member, and Central Falls and Rhode Island resident and voter, I strongly oppose to bill H-5193 that would stop our expansion for which we have been already evaluated and approved by the RIDE, and that would set stones on the way of children that hope for a high-quality education they deserve. I hope you do to.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinion.

Respectfully,  
Angel Mendez